



Professional practice within the first 1000 days

"The first 1,000 days of life - the time spanning roughly between conception and one's second birthday - is a unique period of opportunity when the foundations of optimum health, growth, and neurodevelopment across the lifespan are established." UNICEF (2013)

The period within a child's first 1000 days is highly significant due to it being a period of rapid development where interrelated factors influence growth. It is a combination of milestones, change and development that define the first 1000 days, arguably making it the most important developmental time during any individual's life. It is also noted that a holistic approach is required during the first 1000 days. Lynch (2019, p64) suggests that adopting a holistic lens within the first 1000 days improves child health and well-being. In addition to this the child has a clear understanding on how the parent/ guardian will deal with situations if the holistic approach is adopted from the beginning creating a happy environment where everyone feels understood. In addition to this many important connections are made within the first 3 years of a child's life. Young children's brains develop rapidly and a reaction from others around them actively promotes this rapid development. They search and seek-out interactions with their caregivers, and the experiences help shape who baby is and how they feel about themselves. According to Gradovski *et al.* (2019, p4) the first 1000 days are pivotal in establishing relationships with others and can become obvious later if a child has been deprived of this. Highlighting the increased opportunities an infant could gain from attending a playgroup, creche, and the importance of socialising and creating positive relationships with peers from an early age.

Activities

Activities and play help the core development of a child, through play children learn how to communicate with others, set boundaries and respect, whilst learning new skills. A Child's brain

development begins in the womb, and babies are born with powerful motivation and ability to learn, sensory play can provide the connections between brain development creating new connections whilst conducting the simplest of activities.



1 - Outdoor play



2 - Sensory play



3 - Imaginative play



4 - Singing

Piaget (1952, p176) discusses the sensorimotor stage which is the first four stages within the theory of cognitive development, from birth up until the child is 2 years old, it can also be broken up into six sub-stages for each period of significance within the first two years of a Child's life. Highlighting, that a rapid period of cognitive growth is helped by activities such as sensory play. In addition to this, it is also noted that the main development within the sensorimotor stage is children begin to understand that objects exist, and once this has happened, they move onto the next stage. Government legislation now reinforces this approach (A curriculum for funded non-maintained nursery settings 2021) The Curriculum for funded non-maintained nursery settings in Wales has created a holistic idea of child development with practitioners who can notice details within child development and form positive relationships with the child and parent based upon trust and mutual respect, whilst building the emotional and mental well-being by developing confidence, resilience and empathy.

The curricula also highlights the importance of planning in the moment and having a child lead environment based upon trust between practitioner and child that measured risks will take place during activities, within the set of boundaries that have been implemented within the setting.

Current Challenges

The early years sector has transformed over the past 20 years gaining more respect as a service rather than a motherly role, due to the work that is done within settings and the help that is provided for families. Moyles (2007, p3) suggests that staff often face difficulty in doing what they deem 'right' for a child as they are governed by boundaries set by Government, who often have never worked within an early years setting. Highlighting the multiple challenges within the sector and the additional impact of covid-19 also surfacing across all areas including early years, creating hard and sometimes stressful environments for staff. In addition to this, quality of staffing is another challenge due to the high demand of the job for little pay, creating daily challenges due to lack of staff, experience or individuals not wanting to work in such demanding role, can lead to major staff shortages and often the closing down of crucial settings. Similarly, the lack of resources due to increasing numbers within settings is an additional challenge. Due to the current cost of living crisis and budget cuts there is no funding to purchase new toys, activities or learning resources to help development. In addition to this, anxiety and lack of confidence is a challenge within the early years, some children have never experienced situations without a parent/caregiver and can be anxious to leave, but this can also work both ways and often the parent/caregiver is more anxious than the child to leave them in unfamiliar surroundings if neither are used to being apart. Illustrating the importance of care within the early years sector as often the parent/caregiver needs as much reassurance as the child. Also, another obstacle becoming more apparent within settings are children on extreme different levels of development, walking, talking, communicating and interacting, suggesting that some children have had no stimulation or interaction for 2 years due to various reasons such as parents working for NHS, parents working from home and not able to give full attention all day, mental health issues within the home, whilst other children have had the opposite spending more time with their parents than what would've been possible pre covid increasing them developmentally creating a huge ability gap within year groups in school.

Enabling Enviroments



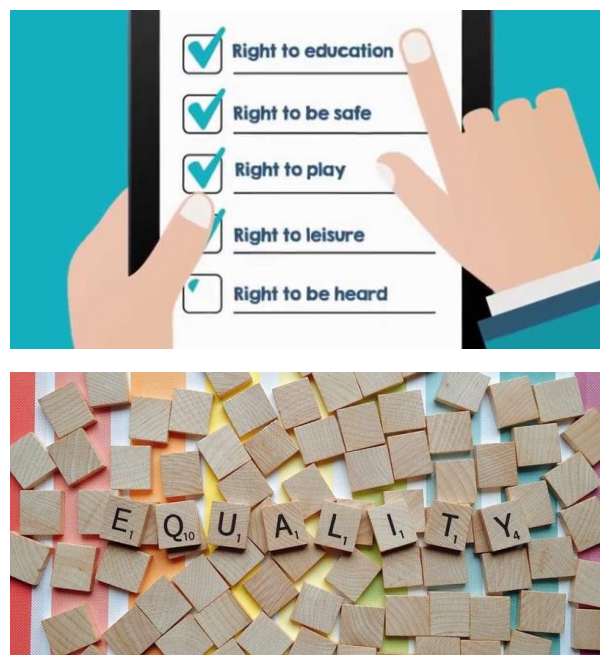


The environment within a setting should be a model of a joyful approach to learning which is also encouraging and safe. Moyles (2007, p155) suggests that enabling environments are central to a Child's growth and development. In addition to this, it is also mentioned that observation within an enabling environment can further help the Child's development, as the practitioner is able to see what interest, obstacles and targets are for the next time the task is complete by that child. Also, fine motor skills task with loose parts can encourage curiosity and explorative play, these tasks are also beneficial for children to understand and learn boundaries allowing them to take the lead on their own learning evaluating the danger of putting something small in their mouth for example, whilst the practitioner watches over giving them the confidence to navigate their way around the task on their own. Bruce (2012, p7) discusses Froebel and his idea of the natural growth of children through action and play. It highlights Froebel's strong belief on the importance of the whole child, and how practitioners should treat every individual differently according to their own personal development and needs. Demonstrating the importance of an enabling environment as one child may succeed outdoors whilst another prefers to sing and dance, both are equals and deserve to have their likes and interests met. Montessori's idea of child centered environments highlight the

importance of real tools in settings, providing an authentic experience for the child allowing them to play with and use every day tools to help create a enabling environment and a confident child.

Being inclusive

Every child has the right to education, play and a safe environment to explore. Inclusivity is pivotal within the first 1000 days of a Childs life due to the vulnerability and the long-standing effect this could have if a child is not treated the same as their peers. It is pivotal that every child is embraced for who they are, regardless of their culture, language, ethnicity, disability or gender. Reflective practice enables to critically evaluate the skills and knowledge to understand the needs of others in the setting whilst also enhancing teamwork and inclusive leadership. In addition to this, listening effectively and communication is enhanced through reflection and can help to develop inclusivity within the setting ensuring everyone feels that they have a voice.



Professional Relationships

Education and care go hand in hand within the first 1000 days, the role of the practitioner is to create stable relationships and interactions with sensitive and responsive adults. Furthermore, it is crucial that support for communication and language are provided as well as opportunities to move and be physically active. Also, a focus on play-based activities and routines which allow children to take the lead in their own learning whilst having the reassurance and support of the practitioner help to re-enforce a positive and effective relationship between child and practitioner.

Bronfenbrenner (1996, p205) discusses the importance of secure relationships around the child that are responsive, consistent and sensitive to the needs of that child. Highlighting the genuine need for a stable, two-way relationship as children benefit from a secure base. Similarly, it is discussed that the quality of the relationship depends on the child and others around that child. Illustrating the need for a fundamental bond with the child from the start and to respect how the child reacts in order to create a respectful relationship between the child and the caregiver.

International Approaches

Many international countries have different approaches to education. The methods that are used can often be seen as more effective for the child due to the relaxed but effective system the government have put in place in order to create the best opportunity's for each individual child without stereotyping everyone into a single box.



5 - Forest school

William-Sieghfredson (2012, p62) discusses the Danish system of forest school and the significance of natural environments and creating the opportunity for children to learn in the outdoors. Furthermore, it is based on 'reform pedagogy' and the whole child being focused on their own growth, independence and personality. This creates a community of children with high self-worth and independence due to the nature of the forest school. Equally, creating a tolerance and consideration for others who might not do things in the same way you would.



The curricula Te Whariki created in New Zealand, considers young children' understandings and opinions as valuable as the adults that surround them. Sellers (2013, p27) highlights the significance of a playful experience where children do not even realise they are learning. Demonstrating the power of play and how significant it can be to a child' growth intellectually, emotionally and

physically. The woven mat theory includes all aspects of education and life in order to create a well-rounded curriculum and offer something to every child.

The new curriculum in Wales has adopted aspects of both curriculums discussed due to their high success and overall happiness of the children within these countries. Although there is no great data yet, the hope is that the new curriculum in Wales will be as greatly adopted and celebrated as the above to create better learning experiences for all children within the community highlighting everyone's strengths.

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